

Public Health Committee of the City of La Salle
March 28, 2016
6:45 p.m. - City Hall Council Chambers

Chairman Duncan called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m.

Present- Chairman Duncan, Alderman Bacidore, Alderman Reynolds, Alderman Lavieri, Alderman Schneider.

Others Present: Mayor Grove, City Clerk Carrie Brown, Alderman Demes, Alderman Ptak, Alderman Herndon, Chief Rob Uranich, Chief Andy Bacidore, Attorney Jim McPhedran, Don Aleksy, Virginia Kochanowski.

A quorum was present.

Approximately 25 citizens and two representatives of the press were present. Chairman Duncan opened the meeting stating that Alderman Bacidore referred a proposal to the Public Health Committee requesting that the burning of yard waste, garden refuse and tall grasses be allowed two weekends each year. Chairman Duncan stated that the burning policy was instituted in 2012 and has resulted in an overall improvement in the City. He stated that he has received many positive comments about the burning ban. Chairman Duncan explained that the City has invested in the two leaf vacuum trucks to assist residents in disposing of leaves. His personal feeling is that the amount of work required to rake leaves to the curb for pick-up or burn leaves is about the same. He explained that he would ask each Committee member for their opinion on the matter and would then open the floor to public comment.

Alderman Bacidore stated he was not as concerned about the burning of leaves, his proposal focused on yard waste. Unlike Chairman Duncan, Alderman Bacidore stated that he has had many people approach him who are against the burn ban. Alderman Bacidore added that we cannot allow people to burn tall grasses only; it must be all yard waste.

Alderman Reynolds stated that in his opinion you cannot make everyone happy. He asked Chief Bacidore if we have seen a reduction in fire incidences since leaf burning was banned. Chief Bacidore confirmed that the City has seen a reduction in fire incidences triggered by leaf burning since the ban was put in place. Alderman Reynolds stated that he is against burning.

Alderman Lavieri is against any change to the ordinance. He stated that he had one resident complain at the time the ordinance was being considered and one after it was passed, but since that time the majority of comments he receives from residents are positive in nature because many have health issues. Alderman Lavieri added that in his opinion you should not be able to irritate your neighbor's health just because you want to burn. He stated the City has other avenues for disposal, so he is against any change to the current ordinance.

Alderman Schneider stated that when the ordinance was proposed years ago, he had mixed feelings. But, as he researched and learned the type of toxins that were being released during burning, he was in favor of the burn ban. He expressed that his feelings remain unchanged. He added that when he learned an invite was put in the News Tribune's Open Forum by Alderman Bacidore inviting those for burning to attend this meeting, he chose to use social media to invite those against burning to come or express feedback. He received many positive comments from residents in favor of the burn ban and also heard from citizens from other communities who praised the City of La Salle for being pro-active in

enacting the no burning policy. Alderman Schneider expressed his opinion that giving a weekend of burning only exemplifies what is in the air. He does not feel it is a good idea to open this can of worms when our program is working well.

Alderman Herndon reiterated that the proposal brought forth by Alderman Bacidore was a request to burn garden waste and not leaves. Alderman Herndon continued by explaining that he was one of the aldermen that supported burning when the issue was considered in 2012. Many of his constituents in the Fourth Ward have large lots, have resided there for many years and have gardens. Alderman Herndon stated that when considering this issue, he thinks it is difficult to bag up garden waste and the best way to dispose of it would be to burn. He does not feel the people are asking too much. His feelings toward burning have not changed although the Aldermen added that he will abide by the ordinance but is in favor of designating a weekend in the spring and fall to burn garden waste.

Alderman Demes explained that he supported the burn ban and was the one who brought it up on the floor back in 2012. He feels we are proactive being a non-burning City. He has not had anyone in his ward come to him complaining about not being able to burn, but has only received praise about how nice it is not to have burning. He stated that he does not see a reason for this since we have procedures in place to dispose of garden waste.

Alderman Ptak agreed with Alderman Demes and feels we should leave the ordinance as it stands. He added that the current ordinance provides for hardship cases where a permit to burn can be obtained from the Fire Chief.

Alderman Schneider asked for verification that yard waste sticker revenue does not go to the City. The Mayor confirmed that the proceeds go to the waste hauler as part of our contractual agreement.

Chief Bacidore stated that if we give permission for residents to burn yard waste, it would be very hard to monitor what is being burned and difficult for it to be policed.

Alderman Bacidore confirmed that the cost of a bag and sticker ends up around \$4.00. He added that for some people, especially those on a fixed income, this becomes a hardship.

Chairman Duncan then asked for comments from the public in attendance.

Mr. William Gahan resident of 533 Garfield Avenue stated that he does not see why two weekends a year to burn garden refuse would hurt as it would not put that much into the air. He prefers to burn tomato plants, etc. than bag them up. He does not have access to a truck so is unable to haul yard waste to the City's drop off.

John Fesco of 208 Edwards Avenue expressed concern about leaves. He has a large lot and brings leaves to the curb. However, his concern is that the leaf vacuum does not always make it on his scheduled day due to wind, or mechanical issues or rain which leaves him having to do the work twice. What normally takes him two days now could be done in an afternoon when burning was allowed. For him, it would be cost prohibitive to bag the leaves as it is about \$14.00 for five bags with stickers. He would like to be able to burn everything or burn nothing.

Ron Witek of 2210 Malcolm Avenue stated he has lived here for seventy six years as has his family. He added that the people in attendance at tonight's meeting have nice yards. He does not remember any

of his neighbors or family being upset about leave burning except for one person. He cannot understand how a group like the council can come in and establish rules over things we have done all our lives and say it is so much better. He feels there needs to be give and take.

Mr. Gary Gahan of 608 Baker Avenue stated he has a nice garden of which he donates food to the Food Pantry. He does not have a truck and wondered what people who do not have trucks to haul it to the City's leaf drop off are supposed to do. He does not understand why two weekends a year to burn yard waste is a big deal.

Ed Krueger of 575 Baker Avenue asked how many aldermen have gardens. Two aldermen responded that they did. He added that the council wants residents to keep their properties looking nice, yet residents are penalized. He expressed that in order to keep properties nice, residents need more than two weekends to burn and he would like help disposing of garden waste. He stated that he can no longer grow sweetcorn because he has no way to dispose of it and bagging it is not an option. Alderman Schneider asked what he has been doing over the last few years with garden waste. Mr. Krueger replied that he bagged it up and brought it to his brother's in Peru for him to burn. Mr. Krueger stated that he does not want burning all the time, but would like it to be regulated as to what we can burn and when. He feels sorry for people with health issues, but indicated that we do have a thing called air conditioning so people can stay indoors. He asked the council to give it a chance.

Mary Neff of 210 Pershing stated that she supports the burning ban. She indicated that some people just don't care about their neighbors. If you say they can burn on Monday, they will burn on Tuesday. She felt it is better to have a rule.

Gary Martin of 127 11th Street came forward and the Mayor indicated that Gary for two seasons received a special permit to burn because the leaf vacuum could not get to his property. However, they have now found a way to reach his property. Mr. Martin expressed his desire is to see perhaps a week or more of leaf pick-up in the spring. Alderman Schneider added that he asked for a week in the spring as well and was outnumbered at the time, but hopes the idea can be revisited.

Margaret Callahan of 1328 Argyle stated that there are people that are not neighborly and since they cannot burn they just let their leaves blow. She also complained that many times the leaf vacuum does not come on the day it is scheduled or it rains and then the leaves blow away. She feels there needs to be some leeway especially in the spring.

John Kasik of 431 Garfield Avenue stated that he has a lot of trees, sticks and branches. He takes them to the east end drop-off pile and indicated that every time he has been there the pile is on fire. He asked why the pile is burning if the City has a ban on burning. Mayor Grove added that the City does not light it. Mrs. Callahan added that she has noticed that the pile is always burning every time she has been out there. Mayor Grove stated that after a certain amount of refuse is there, the City takes an end loader and moves it to another area near the treatment plant. Mayor stated that people do light this, but it is not the City doing so. It is not in a residential area and if it does affect guests of Rotary Park the fire is extinguished. Mayor added that the City has the leaf vacuum pick-up, the dump site and the yard waste bag pick-up as options to dispose of leaves and waste. Mayor Grove stated that we may look into establishing a leaf pick-up in the spring.

Connie Tonarelli of 1063 Creve Coeur brings her leaves to the curb however expressed concern that a big yellow truck is always parked by the curb preventing the leaf vacuum from picking up her leaves. It is a lot of work and she ends up having to bag everything. The Mayor asked if she had talked to the neighbor about moving his truck. Mrs. Tonarelli stated that she did not. The Mayor said she can always call the Police Department or her aldermen.

Martha Patelli of 1024 9th followed- up on Mrs. Tonarelli's comments adding that she is 87 years old and the situation it becomes a burden for her to get rid of her yard waste. Physically it is difficult for her and bagging is too expensive. Mrs. Patelli stated that for Mrs. Tonarelli to be allowed to burn once in a while would be a great help. She takes great pride in her property as do most of us.

Mr. Patelli of 1024 9th Street stated that he recently took six pick-up loads to the east end and every time he went there over a period of several days the pile was smoldering. Every once and awhile I see the City tractor there. At some point he feels that area will be full. He is opposed to the burn ban. In terms of pollution and health problems, he doesn't see the difference since Peru is burning and the west winds carry it into La Salle anyway and the pile is burning on the east end. He thinks each and every alderman has received complaints about burning whether they want to admit it or not. The Mayor stated that Gary Martin was the only resident that has ever complained directly to him about the burning ban.

Mike Kasap, Environmental Services La Salle County and La Salle resident stated there is a lot of pride in the City and property owners are proud and want to maintain their quality of life in their own community. Mr. Kasap said that he has a gripe that the City has 50% funding grants to beautify downtown La Salle on tax payer dollars (façade grant), spent \$78,000 four years ago to buy a leaf vacuum and at that same time spent \$30,000 to \$40,000 to buy a chipper truck. His feeling is that the City has equipment available to do the work. We have a policy in the fall of the year to go suck leaves. He asked, can't we use this same equipment and City employees to pick up garden waste at the curb in the spring?

The Mayor responded that is why we have the yard waste bag program available in the spring. Mr. Kasap said that the bagging becomes a financial burden. Mr. Kasap suggested a holiday where the free bags and lawn waste stickers are supplied to residents at no cost. We want communities to be environmentally friendly. The Mayor asked for the record if Mike was pro-burning. He stated he is pro-environmental correctness and taking care of a problem. Mike stated that he is pro-burning in the spring of the year and also pro-burning of leaves in the fall but also wants to find a solution to the problem. He feels yard bags are too expensive and the use of funds, such as for the facade grant should be looked at. Mayor Grove stated that the scope of this meeting was about burning and if Mr. Kasap wanted to review budgets and financials they could meet at another time.

Alderman Schneider asked those in attendance if the cost of bags and stickers was the true issue and if providing bags and stickers as a solution would solve the problem. Comments were made that the bags are useless. The comment was made that by time you fill them they are punctured and they fall apart.

John Fesco reiterated his concerns with the amount of work it takes to haul an acre of leaves. He stated that you cannot rely on the leaf vacuum truck to be there when they say they will be there. With weather, wind and other issues, many times all the leaves you rake to the curb scatter. With burning, he could complete the project in a weekend. Mr. Fesco did commend the City on its branch pick-up

program. He also brought up about concerns about dust from Illinois Cement. The Mayor stated that the issue of cement dust was out of the scope of this meeting.

It was also clarified that John Duncan IV who was an alderman at the time headed up the committee to research burning. The topic was originally brought forth by Alderman Demes.

Alderman Duncan asked if there were any other members of the public who wanted to speak. No one came forth. He recapped by stating that his impression is that most in attendance want to be able to burn yard waste, and that not many were concerned about burning leaves. He asked if that was a fair statement and there was no objection from those in attendance. Alderman Duncan recognized some want to burn everything, but that in his opinion is not right. Alderman Duncan added that the City will explore options and solutions to address the garden waste issue. The issue of sticks/branches came up and Alderman Duncan stated that the City has a program where City crews will pick branches up at the curb for a cost of \$10.00 for the first fifteen minutes.

A brief discussion followed about the difference in smoke from burning leaves versus garden refuse and whether the spring or fall is a better time to burn them. The consensus was that it is better to burn garden refuse in the fall.

Mr. Ron Witek stated that he has listened to everyone present and wants to briefly summarize. He sees that six of the aldermen are against burning and two are in favor. He sees the concern of the Fire and Police Chief regarding the task of sorting through what can be burned and what can't when responding to a call. He asked the council to think of the people who had things that were well before and try to make them as well as you can with the new rules you make. He expressed that it is a difficult task to decide what can be burned and who will watch over it. He asked for a little leeway to make the people happy. He felt the people for burning are in majority. He added that it must be that way as other communities allow burning. This is what the majority of people in La Salle want.

Alderman Bacidore explained that he wrote the Open Forum inviting those who want to burn to attend. He assumed those who are against burning would show up as well.

Alderman Herndon stated that in 2012 he made a motion to take this issue to referendum. He believes tonight he should make that same motion and take it to referendum to take it to the people in 2017.

Alderman Duncan thanked everyone for coming and showing interest in this issue.

Alderman Bacidore moved to amend the burning ordinance to allow one week in April and October, with a designated rain weekend, to burn garden waste, branches, bush trimmings and trees. For lack of a second, the motion failed.

Alderman Schneider wanted to respond to Mr. Witek's comments. Alderman Schneider explained that when the council comes to these decisions it is a hybrid decision of individual opinions and the opinions of those in our wards. Even though people may not have attended this evening, aldermen do receive comments. If residents feel their alderman is not representing their views, residents have the option to vote them out. We try to respect everyone's opinions.

Alderman Duncan added that even though a motion wasn't passed, perhaps the concerns brought forward tonight will be considered to see if solutions can be found. Just because a motion was not passed does not mean the issue will be ignored.

Mr. Witek asked the aldermen to look at the entire picture and consider all views when making a decision. Alderman Schneider added that it is very important that residents make their opinions known to those who share the same views and to those who share the opposing viewpoint.

Jerry Reynolds added that the decisions we make tonight are not cast in stone. The ideas and opinions expressed tonight will be considered and perhaps other options can be found.

Alderman Demes stated for the record that this issue was not passed quickly in 2012. It went on for months and many people attended the council meetings. The overall feeling was that we needed a burning ban in La Salle. The ordinance was passed after months of consideration. The majority of people who attended those meetings were against burning. He asked where this group was at that time.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie Brown".

Carrie Brown, City Clerk